



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENCE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION.

BY a joint resolution approved August 13, 1888, Congress authorized the printing of a new edition of the diplomatic correspondence of the American Revolution, with historical and legal notes by Francis Wharton. This action on the part of Congress was induced by the disclosure of defects in the text of the correspondence as published by Jared Sparks, as well as by the discovery of important documents which were unknown to Mr. Sparks. The editor of the new edition died soon after it was ready for the press, and before much progress had been made in the printing; and authority was conferred on his literary executor to continue the work of publication. This work is now almost finished. All that it lacks of completion is the printing of a subject index.

It will be time to discuss the merits of the new edition when it is in the hands of the public. The object of the present article is merely to point out the defects in the text of Sparks, as they have been revealed by an examination of the whole correspondence. In this way it is hoped that something may be contributed to the elucidation of a question that has been much controverted even to the present day.

In attempting to pronounce a judgment on the text of a correspondence published more than two generations ago, something must be allowed for the change that has taken place in our views of editorial duty. The standard of fidelity prescribed by Cromwell for the young Lely, who was ordered to paint the Protector as he was, with all his scars and wrinkles, has not always been accepted by those who have sought to portray the character and conduct of public men by their letters. On the contrary it has been thought to be proper, if not a matter of duty, to correct and alter correspondence so as to make it conform to the canons of taste prevalent at the

time and place of publication, and to omit any passages that may contain opinions which time has failed to justify, or which it is probable that the author might, if he were alive, desire to modify or suppress. Modern criticism condemns this view of editorial duty ; and it is not strange that in the revolution recent editors have sometimes gone too far. Among men who write at all, there are few, if any, who do not at times, when under the sway of impulse or misconception, utter sentiments in the secrecy of correspondence which it would be unjust to publish. Fidelity to truth does not require us to pander to a low and prurient curiosity, by publishing private writings which shock our sense of propriety or of justice.

But in regard to correspondence of an official character, the limits within which alterations and omissions are permissible must be very narrow. The great mass of the diplomatic correspondence of the American Revolution is composed of official letters, written by one official person to another, on subjects of public concern. In such case the writer must be held responsible for what he utters, both as to substance and as to form. To alter the form is to deprive us of one means of forming an estimate of the writer ; to destroy the substance is to deceive us as to historical facts. That an editor has done either the one thing or the other in the publication of official historical documents, must greatly detract from the value of his work and impair confidence in it. It is true that in the contemporary publication of diplomatic correspondence it is usual to suppress such passages as might be detrimental to the public interest. But the rule in such cases is to print the imperfect text as an "extract," or by the use of appropriate signs to indicate that there are omissions.

The alterations in the text of the diplomatic correspondence as published by Sparks may be classified as follows :

1. Changes in the style, for rhetorical or grammatical effect.
2. The omission of whatever seemed to be undignified or indelicate.
3. The suppression of passages exhibiting the antagonisms of our Revolutionary leaders and the existence among them

of personal motives and antipathies, or suggesting doubts as to their patriotic zeal.

4. The elimination of whatever might tend to offend the susceptibilities of the British people.

I.

The changes in style are numerous and run all through the correspondence. Their character may be shown by a few illustrations.

In the letters of Silas Deane, from France, we find "Employ must be found," changed to "Employment must be found;" "to appear in a proper character and defend," is printed "to appear in a proper character, and put in a defence;" "long-accustomed form and etiquette," is made to read "long-established form and etiquette;" "the uncertainty of my situation will not permit my engaging for anything certain to one who might deserve confidence," reads: "the uncertainty of my situation will not permit my making engagements to one who might deserve confidence." Where Deane expresses fear lest he may have "omitted something," Sparks says: "omitted some things deserving attention." Deane says: "The United Colonies want about three millions value of manufactures annually (it has heretofore been rising of that) from Europe." In Sparks the parenthetical clause is: "it has heretofore been a little more." Where Deane speaks of giving French manufactures "the advantage of the first lead in American commerce," Sparks says: "the advantage of anticipating others in American commerce." In a letter of Deane's to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, of December 1, 1776, some of the changes made in the style are as follows: In the original it is declared that the bills issued by Congress must be "paid off by taxes and new emissions made;" Sparks says: "paid off by taxes and new emissions." "This is obvious, that," becomes "It is obvious that." "I have in a former letter wrote," is changed to: "I have in a former letter written." This last alteration is frequently made, since Deane habitually said "have wrote." A subordinate clause, — "with

many other obvious reasons," is converted into the beginning of a sentence: "There are other obvious reasons." The expression "prevented the loan and fell the stock," is changed to "prevented the loan and lowered the stock." Deane also says: "The credit of Great Britain, though it has not fell," while Sparks prints: "has not fallen."

In the letters of John Adams constant modifications of style have been made. Thus in a note of Adams to Vergennes, of July 1, 1780, we may point out, among others, the following:

ADAMS.

The advantages which Spain has gained in West Florida, and particularly of late at Mobile, and the probability that they will succeed in acquiring both the Floridas . . . They (the English) will see every possession they have beyond their island lopped off . . .

I presume not to know. . . .

Want of knowledge or attention.

While they have the superiority of the sea.

Without a superiority of naval force, New York will never be taken.

If the last year the enemy had marched . . .

This it was induced them.

The English are in possession of Canada . . . in which there are a great number of posts.

It is force and fear and policy.

SPARKS.

The advantages which Spain has gained in West Florida, and particularly of late at Mobile, and the probability that she will succeed in gaining both the Floridas . . . They (the English) will see every possession they have beyond the island lopped off . . .

I pretend not to know. . . .

Want of knowledge and attention.

While they have the superiority at sea.

Without a superiority of naval force, clear and indisputable, New York will never be taken.

If in the last year the British army had marched . . .

This it was that induced them.

The English are in possession of Canada . . . in which there is a great number of ports.

It is force, fear and policy.

It would be very easy to reduce them in this way to such misery.

It would be very easy in this way to reduce them to such misery.

In a letter of Adams to the president of Congress, dated at Amsterdam, September 24, 1780, we find the following changes:

ADAMS.

Since the receipt of the despatches by the Hon. Mr. Searle, I have been uninterruptedly employed in attempting to carry into execution the designs of Congress.

The first inquiry which arose was whether. . . .

The same reasons determined me to communicate nothing to the regency of Amsterdam or any other branch of government, and to proceed to seek a loan upon the foundation of private credit.

This business must be conducted with so much secrecy and caution, and I meet with so many difficulties for want of language, the gentlemen I have to do with not understanding English, and not being very familiar with French, that it goes slower than I could wish.

SPARKS.

Since the receipt of the despatches from Congress, brought by Mr. Searle, I have been uninterruptedly employed in attempting to carry into execution their designs.

The first inquiry which arose in my own mind was whether. . . .

I then inquired whether it would be proper to communicate anything to the regency of Amsterdam, or any other branch of government whatsoever; and I was advised against it, and to proceed to effect a loan upon the simple foundation of private credit.

This business must all be settled with so much secrecy and caution, and I am under so many difficulties, not understanding the Dutch language, and the gentlemen I have to do with not being much more expert in French than I am myself, and not understanding English at all, that the business goes on slower than I could wish.

Many alterations of style were made in the letters of Carmichael, but it is unnecessary here to describe them. This

branch of our investigations may be concluded by setting forth the changes made in the letter in which Livingston resigned the office of Secretary of Foreign Affairs:

LIVINGSTON.

Having lately learned. . . .

Distinguished marks of confidence which I have experienced repeatedly, as well from Congress as from its respective members. . . .

The Reverend Mr. Tetard . . . finds himself reduced, at an advanced age, to want the necessities of life, the enemy having destroyed his house, laid waste his farm, carried off his slaves, and plundered him of his property. For these facts I take the liberty to refer Congress to his memorial, presented to them in 1778.

As it is probable, sir, that Congress, in making a new appointment, would wish to adapt the salary to the necessary expense of the department, of which they have heretofore had no means to be fully informed, I owe it, as well to them as to my successor, to assure them that with the utmost economy which my situation would admit of, I have been compelled to expend something more than three thousand dollars beyond the allowance of Congress, exclusive of carriages, horses, and household furniture, all of which I brought with me.

SPARKS.

Having lately been informed. . .

Distinguished marks of confidence which they (Congress) have repeatedly shown me in the execution of my trust. . . .

The Reverend Mr. Tetard . . . finds himself reduced, at an advanced age, to absolute ruin by the enemy and our own army, both having contributed to lay waste his farm, destroy his buildings, and pillage his property. For these facts I take the liberty to refer Congress to his memorial.

As Congress, in making a new appointment, will probably wish to adapt the salary to the necessary expenses of the department, of which they have heretofore had no opportunity to be fully informed, it is a duty I owe to them as well as to my successor, to assure them that my expenses, exclusive of purchase and wear, carriages, horses, and household furniture, have exceeded my allowance from Congress upwards of three thousand dollars.

II.

The character of our Revolutionary patriots renders it superfluous to say that the omissions made in their letters on the score of dignity or of delicacy are far less numerous than the changes of style. Nor are they of great importance. Nevertheless, it does not seriously jar us now and then to find a lapse into pleasantry, a slight abatement of reserve or a little plainness of speech. We are no longer blinded by the "dignity of history." It does not diminish our respect for John Adams to learn that he once suggested that the Dutch might become "undutchified." In Sparks the passage is omitted. Referring to the imprisonment of Henry Laurens in the Tower of London, Adams said: "He is ill of a lax, much emaciated, and very invective against the authors of his ill-usage." In Sparks this sentence runs: "He is sick with a cholera, much emaciated, and very much incensed" *etc.*

One of the notable characteristics of John Adams was the frankness with which he committed his thoughts to writing—a characteristic that has been perpetuated in his descendants. When he returned to Paris to participate in the peace negotiations, fresh from his diplomatic triumphs in the Netherlands, he not unnaturally felt a sense of elation, and he took no pains to conceal it. In his journal of the peace negotiations we find, under the date of November 10, 1782, the following paragraph:

The compliments that have been made me since my arrival in France, upon my success in Holland, would be considered as a curiosity if committed to writing. "Je vous félicite sur votre succès," is common to all. One adds, "Monsieur, ma foi, vous avez réussi bien merveilleusement. Vous avez fait reconnoître votre indépendance; vous avez fait un traité, et vous avez procuré de l'argent. Voilà un succès parfait." Another says, "Vous avez fait des merveilles en Hollande: vous avez culbuté le Statouder et le parti Anglois; vous avez donné bien du mouvement, vous avez remué tout le monde." Another says, "Monsieur, vous êtes le Washington de la négociation." This is the finishing stroke. It is impossible to exceed this.

This paragraph was omitted by Sparks, but it was subsequently published in Adams' complete works.¹

Under the expurgatory pen passages disappear from the letters of Dumas, the faithful, learned and neglected Switzer, who represented the United States at The Hague, as well as from the letters of Carmichael, Deane, Franklin and the Lees.

Dumas with high enthusiasm exclaims: "I had addressed myself to the court of France with an exalted mind and fired with philanthropy"; he is made to whisper: "with a deep interest in your concerns."

Carmichael, exhilarated by his return to his native land, off Reedy Island addressed the president of Congress as follows:

How strangely am I rusticated on the wing to the regions of politesse, and yet forget to mention the ladies. This you will naturally do for me, or palliate this sin of omission with many others of, sir, your obedient servant.

The sin was perpetuated by the suppression of this apology.

Arthur Lee, writing from Paris, says: "Spain is more reserved, *her minister here an old woman.*" In another place he declares: "By such arts they (the British ministry) endeavor to *cover their nakedness and* sustain their desperate cause." In each of these sentences the words here italicized are omitted.

Deane, who speaks of a "ticklish situation," is made to say "critical situation"; and when he recommends a suggestion to Congress "for digesting," he is represented as proposing it "for consideration." His offences, however, are not all so cursory. In a letter to Jay, dated at Paris, December 3, 1776, Deane in an omitted passage says:

I must mention some trifles. The queen is fond of parade, and I believe wishes a war, and is our friend. She loves riding on horseback. Could you send me a narrowhegansett horse or two; the present might be money exceedingly well laid out. Rittenhouse's orrery or Arnold's collection of insects, a phaeton of American make and a pair of bay horses, a few barrels of apples, of walnuts, of butternuts, etc., would be great curiosities here, where everything

¹ John Adams' Works, III, 306.

American is gazed at, and where the American contest engages the attention of all ages, ranks, and sexes.

Of omissions on the score of dignity, or of delicacy, only one more example will be produced. Among the circumstances that lent to Lafayette's chivalrous espousal of the American cause the tinge of romance, none more directly appeals to our sense of humanity than the sacrifice of his new domestic felicity. In a joint letter of Franklin and Deane to the Committee of Foreign Affairs, of May 25, 1777, this subject is introduced in the following terms :

He has left a beautiful young wife big with child, and for her sake particularly we hope that his bravery and ardent desire to distinguish himself will be a little restrained by the General's prudence, so as not to permit his being hazarded much, but on some important occasion.

In printing this sentence, Sparks omits the reference to the young wife's condition.

III.

The changes and omissions heretofore disclosed relate chiefly to matters of form. Those that follow relate to matters of substance.

Without the knowledge that distrust and contention at times distracted our public councils, it is impossible either to understand important incidents in our Revolutionary history or to appreciate the constant zeal, the lofty purpose and the complete devotion of those who guided the struggle for independence to a successful conclusion. It is well known that Washington encountered opposition both in the army and in Congress. This opposition proceeded sometimes from distrust of his capacity, sometimes from jealousy of his authority, sometimes from a desire to supplant him. To this fact is attributable, though perhaps not entirely, a movement in 1776 and 1777 to secure the appointment of a foreign officer to the command of the American army. This movement appears to have originated abroad, and it failed to receive support in the

United States; but it was not peremptorily discouraged by some of our representatives in Europe. The limitations of the present article do not admit of a full exposition of this incident, and I will merely quote from a letter of Silas Deane, written in France, to the Committee of Secret Correspondence, of December 6, 1776, the following paragraph which Sparks suppressed :

I submit one thought to you, whether if you could engage a great general of the highest character in Europe, such for instance as Prince Ferdinand, Marshal Broglie or others of equal rank, to take the lead of your armies, whether such a step would not be politic, as it would give a character and a credit to your military, and strike perhaps a greater panic in our enemies. I only suggest the thought, and leave you to confer with Baron de Kalb on the subject at large.

Among the adversities of the Revolutionary contest, none threatened greater injury to the American cause than the quarrels of our diplomatic representatives. Beginning with the altercations between that stormy petrel of controversy, Arthur Lee, and the ill-balanced and unfortunate Silas Deane, they finally assumed an aspect more portentous than the presence of the British armies in the field. In a passage omitted by Sparks, Franklin says of Arthur Lee: "That restless genius, wherever he is, must either find or make a quarrel;" and in Deane, rash, impulsive and given to suspicion, he found a ready antagonist. But the quarrel did not end with them. Franklin was dragged to the brink of the vortex; and, although he did not reply to Lee's assaults, a serious attempt was made to induce Congress to recall him, at a time when his overshadowing reputation and matchless skill were of the utmost value to the American cause.

To a proper comprehension of the origin and quality of these diplomatic quarrels, a knowledge of the character of Arthur Lee is essential, and such knowledge we naturally expect in a measure to gain from his letters. We find, however, that many passages of great importance, as showing the violence of the suspicions and the recklessness of the charges of this "*Junius Americanus*," have been suppressed in the text

of Sparks. Thus, in an omitted paragraph in one of the so-called "Colden" letters, of February 13, 1776, he speaks of the constitution of a committee of congress, — a committee whose members were men of the highest character, — as follows:

Yet I cannot tell to what fatality it is owing, that of the five, two are men of whom I have more diffidence than any others, I have almost said, thro' the whole continent; that I may be explicit, the second and last are men whom I cannot trust. If I am to commit myself into an unreserved correspondence, they must be left out, and the L's or the A's put into their places. This letter, therefore, is to you, sir, and not to the committee. I cannot imagine that what I desire can be deemed impertinent, when it is considered that the very purpose of its appointment is, so far as it relates to me, disappointed by the members. The selection of them instead of inspiring confidence, gives me an apprehension which I did not feel when they were in the general mass.

In a letter of September 10, 1779, to the president of Congress, Lee refers to William Carmichael, who for many years served his country abroad with unblemished reputation, in the following terms:

In the meantime I beg leave to inform Congress that I will transmit to them by the first opportunity such evidence of Mr. Carmichael's character and conduct as I trust will fully satisfy them how unfit and unworthy that gentleman was to be credited in any evidence or information he may have given concerning me. Neither do I despair of being able to prove in time to Congress and to my country the secret motives of interest or malice which have actuated the conduct of those who have stood foremost in endeavoring to cover the crimes of others and visit them unjustly upon me.

On September 19, 1779, the charges against Carmichael are renewed in a passage which, like the preceding one, is omitted. Against Franklin charges of fondness for pleasure, neglect of business and corrupt use of public funds are made and pressed with peculiar vindictiveness. In a single letter of December 7, 1780, matter of this character sufficient to fill more than two printed pages is suppressed.

Perhaps the most unnecessary and surely the most ludicrous incident of the attack on Franklin and Deane, was the participation of Ralph Izard. Izard was one of that unfortunate band of Revolutionary patriots, described in our encyclopaedias as "diplomatists," whose missions to various European courts ended in Paris. The post to which he was assigned was at the court of the Duke of Tuscany, but owing to the refusal of the duke to receive a representative from the revolutionary Congress, he never reached that court, and until he returned to the United States he resided in the French metropolis. A man of proud spirit and hasty temper, the disappointment and inactivity under which he was chafing only increased his unfitness for the office of peacemaker. For, as he informs us, it was in this capacity that he first intervened in the quarrels of the commissioners. In a letter to the president of Congress, of February 16, 1778, he fully describes, in three long passages omitted by Sparks, his relation to the subject, and at the same time discloses the extent to which his partisanship had then developed. These passages are as follows :

I look upon you as my friend, and therefore lay my sentiments freely before you, and confess to you that nothing has ever surprised me so much in my life as the proceedings of the two eldest commissioners in this business. Had they been in politics as infallible as the Pope intends to be in matters of religion, they could not have acted in a greater degree of confidence ; and upon every occasion they seem to consider themselves as the only persons interested in the fate of America. This conduct in one of the gentlemen astonishes me, and I can account for it in no other way than supposing him under the influence of the other, who does not appear to me the best qualified of any man I ever saw, for the character which he has the honor of filling. Upon my arrival here I found a great disunion among the commissioners, the two eldest constantly taking part against the youngest. This led me to conclude that the latter must be to blame, especially as I never, during the many years I have had the pleasure of his acquaintance, heard him accounted the mildest or gentlest man in the world. I immediately endeavored to accommodate these differences, but found it impossible. Both

parties were too firmly convinced of the justice of their own complaints to take such steps as would put it in the power of a mediator to bring about an accommodation ; and as I found that I was laboring in vain, I gave up the point. I cannot say that Mr. Lee has been entirely blameless ; but I must do him the justice to say that the conduct of the other gentlemen towards him has been unjustifiable, and such as could not fail of provoking any man not dead to all sense of injury. These proceedings, together with the misconduct of Mr. Morris, the commercial agent, have been, I am convinced, extremely injurious to our affairs, and have tended to lower the Congress in the opinion of the French court. Mr. Morris' irregularities, however, have carried him to the grave. . . .

I shall not be sorry to be separated from the two eldest commissioners here, whose proceedings I do not approve of. Their situation seems to have intoxicated them ; and there is a degree of hauteur and presumption about one of them (Mr. D.) that cannot fail of being offensive to any gentlemen who has business to transact with him. I am well aware how fatal it is to have disagreements among those who are engaged in the service of the public, and I have taken great pains to avoid them. . . .

In my former letters to you I desired you to direct yours to me to the care of the American commissioner at the court of France. The contents of this letter will show you the impropriety of such a direction. There is another very strong reason why I wish that this may not be done ; which is, that Mr. Lee assures me he has discovered that his dispatches to Congress have been opened by one of his colleagues. I think you will join me in rejoicing that these gentlemen are soon to act in different departments. You will be so good as to address your letters to me to the care of Monsieur le Comte de Clouard, Rue Colbert, à Paris, and they will be forwarded to me into Italy.

In omitted passages in letters of April 11, June 17 and June 28, 1778, and September 29, 1779, Izard continues his denunciations of Franklin with increasing virulence, and perhaps unconsciously shows how he took "great pains" to avoid "disagreements" with other public servants. Though he was not charged with any duty at the French court, the principal origin of his supposed grievance against Franklin and Deane was their disinclination to accept his advice, which Arthur Lee had solicited for purposes of opposition, as to the exclusion of cer-

tain provisions from the treaty of commerce with France. Stung by this fancied slight, Izard addressed Franklin in a tone of angry complaint, and finally worked himself into a frenzy because Franklin refused either to apologize or to quarrel. After vainly trying to compel the acceptance of one or the other alternative, he resorted to vituperation, which he poured forth in letters to Franklin himself as well as to Congress. Deception, ingratitude and dishonesty of various kinds are among the accusations copiously made, which are summed up in a declaration to the president of Congress that he does not believe that Franklin is under the restraint of the principles of virtue and honor. Izard's high character and unquestionable devotion to the American cause tended to give weight to his utterances, and from an historical point of view the most important part of his letters from Paris are the omitted passages relating to the attempt to bring about Franklin's recall.

IV.

In the text of Sparks expressions derogatory to Great Britain are sedulously excluded. Thus, where Arthur Lee refers to George III as a "merciless and unprincipled tyrant," and speaks of his "base mind," "the malignity of his passions" and his "rancorous and envenomed" disposition, the offensive expressions are omitted. An allusion to the "cruelty and vindictive spirit of the enemy" is expunged. In a letter of December 23, 1776, Arthur Lee declares that if the efforts of the United States to establish their independence should in the end "be found fatal to England, it is the perfidy of her ministers, *which never offers anything which could be trusted, which compels it.*" Though this letter was addressed to an Englishman, Lord Shelburne, the clause here italicized is dropped. Another passage, for the omission of which there seems to have been little reason, is that in which Arthur Lee, in reporting the theft of his papers by Elliott, the British envoy at Berlin, says:

He will do better next time, and his court will no doubt encourage him. Public ministers have been regarded as spies. Mr. Elliott will give them the additional title of robbers.

In a letter to John Adams, of February 19, 1780, Lafayette speaks of "treachery and falsehood" being employed by the British; Sparks substitutes the single word "misrepresentations."

But of the eliminations now under consideration, by far the most important are those that relate to barbarities practised by the British army. All through the correspondence, in the letters of Adams, Carmichael, Deane, Franklin, Arthur Lee, Livingston and Morris, references to this subject are omitted in the text of Sparks. Yet, in order to appreciate their importance, it is only necessary to advert to the fact that in the negotiations of the treaty of peace, the cruelties and wanton destruction of property committed by the British army formed the basis of a counter-claim which was successfully urged against the admission of the British demand that the loyalists should be compensated for the confiscation of their estates.

In conclusion, it is proper to say that the changes made by Sparks in the text of the Revolutionary correspondence are more numerous and more important than I had been led to suppose, when I began the work of comparison for myself. Not a small proportion of the errors commonly pointed out in his text may be attributed to the incompetency of copyists and proof-readers, a misfortune which it is hardly possible to escape. Few of the defects which I have exhibited seem to be of that character. They doubtless are referable to a misconception of editorial right and duty, and to a desire to avoid, in what was designed to be a permanent public record, the revelation of whatsoever might create or perpetuate ill-feeling, or exhibit our Revolutionary characters in any other than an always serious and favorable light. That they were due to a spirit of subserviency, no one familiar with the writings of Jared Sparks will maintain. Nor should they be permitted to blind us to the lasting obligations under which we stand for his timely, unceasing and fruitful exertions in the cause of American history.

JOHN BASSETT MOORE.